Kathy Gray: Session 3

The CCR standards outline the specific literacy skills that are necessary for students to succeed in college or a specific career. These standards provide the foundation upon which specific grade level standards are built. As students progress through the grades, they are expected to retain and build upon the standards from the previous school year. For grades K-8, the standards are outlined according to specific grade level. For grades 9-12, they are outlined in two year bands which are more appropriate for the nature of high school coursework. The CCR standards provide a general framework, but it is up to school districts to design a curriculum and a logical scope and sequence, that will enable their students to reach the goals set forth by these standards. It is also the duty of the teacher to plan their instruction accordingly.

The CCR standards address Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language and clearly advocate an integrated approach to literacy instruction. The standards require students to be challenged to use higher level thinking skills, including evaluation, analysis, and synthesis, in response to both narrative and expository text. This type of higher level thinking is expected to be an integral component of the ELA classroom as well as every content area classroom. The underlying premise is that literacy instruction must be a fundamental part of instruction in every classroom.

For grades K-5, the standards indicate the overall goals for the reading of literature and informational text. The skills are broken down into four categories: Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, and Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity. The skills and text requirements gradually increase in complexity through the grade levels. By studying the standards, teachers can see not only what is expected of the students at their grade level but also what was expected the previous year and what will be required the following year. Foundational skills, including Print Concepts, Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Fluency, for each grade level are also addressed. In addition to reading, standards specific to writing and speaking and listening are also clearly outlined. The categories specific to writing are: Text Types and Purposes, Production and Distribution of Writing, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, and Range of Writing. Some of these standards do not begin until grade 3 and those that do require support from both peers and adults. At these grade levels students are beginning to develop the skills that will enable them to not only write in response to their reading but to also present their ideas to an appropriate audience in a proficient manner. For Speaking and Listening the focus areas are: Comprehension and Collaboration and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas. The final area addressed by the standards is Language: Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, and Vocabulary Acquisition and Use. A range of genre and complexity of texts is also included.

The standards for the higher grade levels follow the format for the lower grades. For grades 6-8, the standards are outlined per grade level just as they are for grades K-5. For grades 9-10 and 11-12 the standards are outlined in two-year bands. At these levels, the writing standards are much more in-depth and clearly express the expectation that students will create their own narrative writings as well as develop the abilities to research, write, and present their writings with increasing depth and sophistication. The use of technology as a tool to achieve these goals is also emphasized.

The CCR standards are like a blueprint. They outline what our students must be able to do upon graduation in order to be functioning and productive members of society. Furthermore, they outline the skills that must be addressed, at each grade level, in order to achieve that goal. On first look, the standards seem overwhelming. But, when studied closely, there is an underlying organization and the plans for achieving the goals are clear. I think it is imperative that all teachers study this document so they can truly understand their specific role in the overall big picture.